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Subject: AP, Denver Post, Durango Herald coverage from yesterday's Congressional hearing

<http://gazette.com/on-colorado-mine-cleanup-superfund-idea-divides-residents/article/1560437>

On Colorado mine cleanup, Superfund idea divides residents

DENVER (AP) — Southwestern Colorado residents told Congress on Thursday that the Gold King Mine blowout and other mines spilling acid waste into waterways could cause serious long-term damage to their tourism economy, but they disagreed on whether a federal Superfund designation would help or hurt.

A rafting company owner, a county commissioner and a chamber of commerce official told the Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee that they don't yet know the full economic impact of the spill, but it has been devastating so far, scaring away visitors and triggering layoffs at travel-related businesses.

An Environmental Protection Agency-led cleanup crew inadvertently triggered the release of 3 million gallons of tainted wastewater from the inactive Gold King Mine north of Silverton on Aug. 5. The water turned the Animas River a mustard-yellow color as it flowed through Durango, Colorado, eventually reaching New Mexico and Utah.

La Plata County Commissioner Bradford Blake said outdoor recreation companies, farms, greenhouses and other businesses that rely on the river and its water suffered immediate losses ranging from \$8,600 to \$100,000 each. "Clearly, we do not know yet what the long-term impact of the Gold King spill, and the publicity generated by it, might be," he said.

Andy Corra, who owns a sporting goods store and rafting company in Durango, said 2015 had been a good year for him before the spill.

"And then boom! The river was closed," he said. "We didn't have any time to plan. We didn't have any time to adjust."

Corra called the Animas the lifeblood of the region and said it will take a massive effort to clean up the scores of inactive mines spilling millions of gallons of waste into the watershed year-round.

He said an EPA designation as a Superfund site is the only obvious solution. Superfund status would make the area eligible for extensive federal funds for a comprehensive cleanup. Other proposals, such as reforming the 1872 mining act and a law that would encourages third-party volunteer groups to clean up abandoned mines, are good steps but don't go far enough, Corra said.

DeAnne Gallegos, executive director of the Silverton Chamber of Commerce, said Superfund designation carries a stigma that can discourage tourism and investment. "Is it the magic bullet? I don't know," she said.

Gallegos also expressed doubts about the EPA, saying Silverton residents had to fight to get the agency to hold a community meeting about the spill.

The EPA has long been interested in a Superfund designation but encountered local opposition.

EPA spokeswoman Melissa Harrison said Thursday that agency officials have been talking with local officials about the Superfund process since the Gold King blowout but that Gov. John Hickenlooper hasn't requested the designation. Hickenlooper's spokeswoman, Kathy Green, said he has no current plans to request the designation but would consider it if it had broad local support.

Republican U.S. Rep. Scott Tipton, whose district includes Silverton and Durango, warned against a Superfund designation and said other options should be considered. "Superfund status does bring with it a stigma, and right or wrong, often that perception is reality," he told the committee.

<http://www.durangoherald.com/article/20151001/NEWS01/151009995/-1/s>

Durango Herald: Tipton questions Superfund status

By Peter Marcus Herald staff writer

DENVER – U.S. Rep. Scott Tipton on Thursday expressed concerns with the prospect of federal officials moving forward with a Superfund listing for Silverton near the inactive Gold King Mine.

A divide has emerged over the Superfund question, with some residents and officials of Silverton worried the listing would be a stain on the community. Silverton and San Juan County officials in August clarified their perspective, suggesting that they are open to a listing but that they have not "foreclosed any options."

In comments before the U.S. Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee, Tipton, a Cortez Republican, stated: "Designating Silverton a Superfund site ... could severely damage the town's reputation and prove costly to the local economy."

A large source of federal dollars is made available to Superfund sites in order to clean up the blighted areas. Questions around a Silverton listing intensified after the Aug. 5 Gold King Mine spill, when an estimated 3 million gallons of mining sludge entered the Animas River.

Andy Corra, owner of 4Corners Riversports in Durango, who spoke at the same hearing, pushed officials to pursue a Superfund listing.

"Right now, adding the Animas Basin's offending mines to the EPA's Superfund National Priorities List is really the only clear path forward," Corra said.

Listening to the hearing was Colorado U.S. Sens. Cory Garner, a Republican, and Michael Bennet, a Democrat. They joined Tipton in pushing for good Samaritan legislation, which would allow private and state entities to restore inactive mines without the fear of liability.

But lawmakers tend to split along party lines when it comes to mining-law reform. The law has not been updated since 1872. Democrats have proposed reforms that would require payments from hard-rock mining for reclamation.

Gardner is concerned, stating: "In reality, what we have to work on right now is the need for legislation that would allow these abandoned mines across the West to be cleaned up by good Samaritans ... while other conversations about mining laws move forward."

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http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_28906259/superfund-talk-dominant-at-senate-hearing-colorado-mine

Denver Post: Superfund talk dominant at Senate hearing on Colorado mine spill

By Jesse Paul

Talk of Superfund designation was dominant Thursday as Colorado's senators listened to testimony in Washington about the small-business impacts of the [Gold King Mine spill](#) above Silverton.

"The spill makes clear the piecemeal approach of the past isn't working," Andy Corra, owner of 4Corners Riversports in Durango, said of cleaning up mine contaminants in southwest Colorado. "It's an ongoing problem. We need a comprehensive approach to cleaning this up."

Corra, who favors Superfund designation in the area of the spill, said his business saw a roughly \$30,000 loss in revenue after the disaster.

"As a business owner, it makes me reluctant to invest in the future if this is going to happen again," he said.

U.S. Sens. Michael Bennet, a Democrat, and Cory Gardner, a Republican, heard from three local business owners and leaders about the effects of the Aug. 5 contaminant release caused by the Environmental Protection Agency.

"We may not know the full extent for years to come," Gardner said of the spill's impact.

Brad Blake, a small-business owner in Durango who serves as a La Plata County commissioner, told the senators that impacts from the spill rippled through his community and are still being felt.

Blake said while a final tally of the spill's cost is still being calculated, one rafting company lost \$100,000 and overall about 150 employees were laid off as a result of the disaster. Blake explained that, moving forward, he is most concerned about repairing the reputation of Animas River.

"The 164 articles about the incident had a value of more than \$3.4 million in advertising," he said. "The wrong kind of advertising."

U.S. Rep. Scott Tipton, R-Cortez, also addressed the senators, speaking first and strongly opposing the EPA designating Silverton and its surroundings as a Superfund site.

Silverton's residents [have long opposed](#) such a listing, which would place the area on the national priority list for hazardous waste cleanup and open up funding.

"I always believe that local communities know what's best for themselves," Tipton said, warning that a Superfund listing could "taint this area."

DeAnna Gallegos, executive director of the Silverton Area Chamber of Commerce, explained how her town is simply in search of any solution that can quickly mitigate the pollution.

"We are in an arranged marriage with the EPA," she said. "We have been working with the EPA for over 25 years."

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